

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 036714

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APPROVED BY NEA - MR. ATHERTON

H - MR. FLATEN (SUBS)

NEA - MR. DAY (SUBS)

S/S - O:AOTTO

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 036714

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:SREF, SY

SUBJECT: PROPOSED ANSWER TO SENATOR BROCK'S LETTER TO
AMBASSADOR RE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

REF: DAMASCUS 475

1. FOLLOWING IS OUR PROPOSED REDRAFT OF YOUR REPLY TO
SENATOR BROCK. REGRET DELAYS IN OUR ANSWER TO YOU, WHICH
TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE PRESENT STATUS OF SYRIAN AID PACK-
AGE ON THE HILL.

2. DEAR SENATOR BROCK:

IN RESPONSE TO YOUR RECENT LETTER, I WELCOME THE CHANCE TO
SHARE WITH YOU MY ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION OF
THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ON THE
ISSUES OF REUNIFICATION WITH RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES
AND FREE EMIGRATION.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 STATE 036714

BY ALL MEASURES, THE CONDITIONS OF THE JEWISH

COMMUNITY HAVE IMPROVED OVER THOSE OF THE PAST DECADE. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THEY ARE CONTINUING TO IMPROVE. AMERICAN AND OTHER JOURNALISTS HAVE IN THE PAST TWO YEARS SPENT SOME TIME IN SYRIA TRYING TO LEARN THE SITUATION IN DEPTH, SOME VERY RECENTLY. THEIR CONSISTENT CONCLUSION WAS THAT THE STATE OF DAILY LIFE FOR THE COMMUNITY HAD BEEN GETTING BETTER.

WE DO NOT RELY, OF COURSE, ON THE EVALUATIONS OF VISITING JOURNALISTS ALONE.

THE STAFF OF THE EMBASSY AND I HAVE DEDICATED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO ANSWERING QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM AMERICA FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO KEEP OURSELVES INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE COMMUNITY'S STATUS. I HAVE RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT PASSPORTS ARE BEING GRANTED TO SYRIAN JEWS FOR BUSINESS VISITS ABROAD, FOR MEDICAL CARE, AS WELL AS FOR TOURISM. THEY ARE REQUIRED TO POST BOND IN EACH CASE AS AN EARNEST OF THEIR INTENT TO RETURN. WE HAVE ISSUED SOME VISAS TO SYRIAN JEWS TO TRAVEL TO THE U.S. ON BUSINESS AND FAMILY VISITS DURING THE PAST YEAR.

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT OTHER MINORITY GROUPS IN SYRIA HAVE BEEN PLEASED WITH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MINORITIES GENERALLY FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS; CHANGES THAT AFFECT OTHER MINORITY GROUPS POSITIVELY ARE LIKELY TO HAVE THEIR EFFECT ON THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AS WELL. AT THE SAME TIME, I AM CONVINCED THAT OUR KNOWN CONTINUING INTEREST AND QUIET EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN HAVE HELPED THE COMMUNITY'S STATUS WITHIN SYRIA. PRESIDENT ASAD STATED LAST YEAR THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WAS SYMPATHETIC ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS TO THE CONCERNS OF FAMILIES LONG SEPARATED. HE HAS GIVEN HIS PERSONAL ASSURANCE THAT FORMER SYRIAN JEWS WHO ARE NOW AMERICAN CITIZENS WOULD BE WELCOME BACK THERE ON FAMILY VISITS.

NEVERTHELESS, THE FUTURE OF SYRIAN JEWS IS LARGELY CAUGHT UP IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. MY ANALYSIS IS THAT THE DOORS FOR REUNIFICATION AND FREE EMIGRATION OF THE
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PAGE 03 STATE 036714

SYRIAN JEWS WILL FULLY OPEN ONLY IN A SITUATION OF OVERALL MIDDLE EASTERN PEACE. I DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERIM PROGRESS, PARTICULARLY FOR INDIVIDUAL CASES OF REUNIFICATION AS THE PEACE PROCESS MOVES FORWARD, BUT I WOULD NOT MISLEAD YOU BY PRETENDING TO PREDICT A TIME FRAME.

YOU WILL KNOW THE DEDICATION OF SUCCESSIVE AMERICAN AD-

MINISTRATIONS TO THE CAUSE OF SECURING A MID-EAST PEACE. PERHAPS YOU SHARE MY EVALUATION THAT DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY POSITIVE AND PROMISE FURTHER PROGRESS IN THE FUTURE. WE ARE BENDING EVERY EFFORT TO BRING ABOUT A SETTLEMENT THROUGH A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION. SYRIA IS ONE OF THE KEY STATES IN THIS NEGOTIATION.

I UNDERSTAND YOUR POINT ABOUT THE INTEREST OF CONGRESS IN SCRUTINIZING THE PROPOSED AID PROGRAM FOR SYRIA CAREFULLY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SYRIAN JEWS. THERE ARE TWO WAYS IN WHICH THE UNITED STATES CAN ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF THE SYRIAN JEWS. ONE IS TO BRING ABOUT A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS. THE OTHER IS TO TRY TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM WITH MEANS WE JUDGE MOST EFFECTIVE, WHICH IN THIS CASE INVOLVES THE USE OF QUIET DIPLOMACY TO CREATE CONDITIONS WITHIN WHICH THE POLICIES IN QUESTION CAN BE CHANGED. WE SETTLED ON THE LATTER COURSE BECAUSE EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN US THAT CONFRONTATION WOULD PRODUCE RESULTS THAT ARE THE OPPOSITE OF THOSE SOUGHT, AND COULD HARM THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST AT STAKE.

A CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH -- SUCH AS ELIMINATING OR THREATENING TO CUT ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA -- WOULD NOT USEFULLY INFLUENCE SYRIA'S POLICY TOWARD ITS JEWISH COMMUNITY, REGARDLESS OF SYRIAN HOPES FOR MORE RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IT WOULD CERTAINLY RISK HARMING OUR PEACE EFFORTS, WITH THEIR LONG-RUN PROMISE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SYRIA, WITHOUT IN ITSELF OFFERING ANY POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVING THE WELL-BEING OF THIS COMMUNITY. KISSINGER

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